

DISCOVERING THE WORLD,

ONE SUMMER AT A TIME



COME SUMMERTIME, THOUSANDS OF NEW YORK CITY CHILDREN HAVE NO OPPORTUNITY TO GET OUT OF THE CITY; INSTEAD, MANY FACE ENDLESS DAYS OF NOISE, BOREDOM AND VIDEO GAMES.

But this can change. For 139 years, The Fresh Air Fund has been sending youngsters from low-income communities to camp and to homes in the countryside, where they experience the joy of space, grass and trees; lakes, bonfires and starry nights; and special bonds with newfound friends. For these children, summer is transformed into something magical and memorable — and more than that, a whole new world opens up.

the *Fresh Air* fund
serving children since 1877



TOP: Evan Sydnor (left) and his Fresh Air brother, Khalilou, of the Bronx, race through the waves during Khalilou's most recent summer visit to Delaware. Fresh Air Fund volunteer host families say the simplest experiences have made the greatest impact on their Fresh Air children, and their own families benefit just as much from the program. Photo: Maria DeForrest

CENTER: Fresh Air child Crisasia (lower left), of Brooklyn, and her host sister, Allison (lower right), learned this past summer that one of the best parts of the Fresh Air experience is making new friends. Photo: Kelly Valeri

BOTTOM: Boys from Camp Tommy learn about the ecosystem of the lake and discover the different species that call it home. Photo: Joan Barker



AND THEY'RE OFF....

AMID THROGS OF HARRIED COMMUTERS STRIDING THROUGH THE PORT AUTHORITY BUS TERMINAL, A SMALL ISLAND OF EXUBERANT CHILDREN AND THEIR TEARY PARENTS VIBRATED WITH ANTICIPATION: SUMMER ADVENTURES WERE ONLY MOMENTS AWAY.



Josaiah, 10, fidgeted and kidded with fellow travelers, talking animatedly about his Fresh Air Fund host family in Scranton, Pa.: "They have two big dogs, Viking and Arly," said the Queens resident. "We're going fishing, and we'll eat the fish. And I'll have some peace and quiet. In Queens, I always hear the neighbors talking, and honking horns and sirens. As soon as the bus leaves, I feel a weight off my chest."

Josaiah was one of about 4,000 New York City children between the ages of 7 and 18 who were on their way to visit volunteer host families in suburban neighborhoods and rural communities along the East Coast, from North Carolina to southern Canada. Children would spend from a week to the whole summer with their host families; some were nervously awaiting their first visit, others, like Josaiah, were returning to what has become a second home.

After five summers observing her son before and after his host family visit, Josaiah's mother, Tonia Davis, has noticed the difference. "He comes home more relaxed," she said. "He's more mature, and he gets along with new people and manages new and different situations better."

The children and their families started arriving at the terminal at 7 a.m. for the first round of departures; after

checking in, the youngsters hung their information tags around their necks and slipped into a waiting area. Fresh Air Fund volunteers watched over the children and kept them entertained with temporary tattoos and games of jacks and Go Fish. Meanwhile, parents, cousins, aunts and uncles watched and waited for their final goodbyes.

Charlene Jones, who stood with her son, Damani, as he waited to embark on his third Fresh Air Fund summer in Ithaca, N.Y., was sad to see him go — but happy that he's getting this experience. Damani's host mother is a college professor, his host sister is in medical school, and his host brothers are in college. "They stress education, which I also feel strongly about," said Jones, who just graduated from Lehman College. "The male bonding is also important, and it's good to have positive role models."

Twelve-year-old Damani, who lives with his mother and sister in the Bronx, is just happy to play outside amid grass and trees, and to revel in the open space. "Everything is so spread out," he said. "You even drive to the neighbors."

When 14-year-old Suejona first arrived

at her host family's home in Ithaca three years ago, she too was surprised by all the space; the change of scenery made her nervous. "It was isolated, and so dark at night — the Bronx is always bright, no matter what time it is," she said. But Suejona's nervousness turned to excitement when she saw a deer, which she'd never seen outside the zoo. Indeed, Suejona had many new experiences: hiking, swimming in a lake and wandering the local farmers market; her host parents, who have no children, taught her to bake bread and to play squash. Suejona became attached to the family's cat, Primo, and husky dog, Izzy, and especially to her host parents. "I don't like being away from them for too long," she said.

Tyrek, 13, was heading to Greene, N.Y., near Albany, for his second summer. The differences between Brooklyn and Greene are too numerous to count: the wider roads, the empty space filled

with grass and fields, his host family's backyard, which is almost a park. "My favorite thing is going around town and seeing houses, not apartments," he said. "And I love how quiet it gets at night." Tyrek's mother, Gail Beckles, nodded in agreement. "I'm so happy he gets to experience something other than the busy streets of New York," she said.

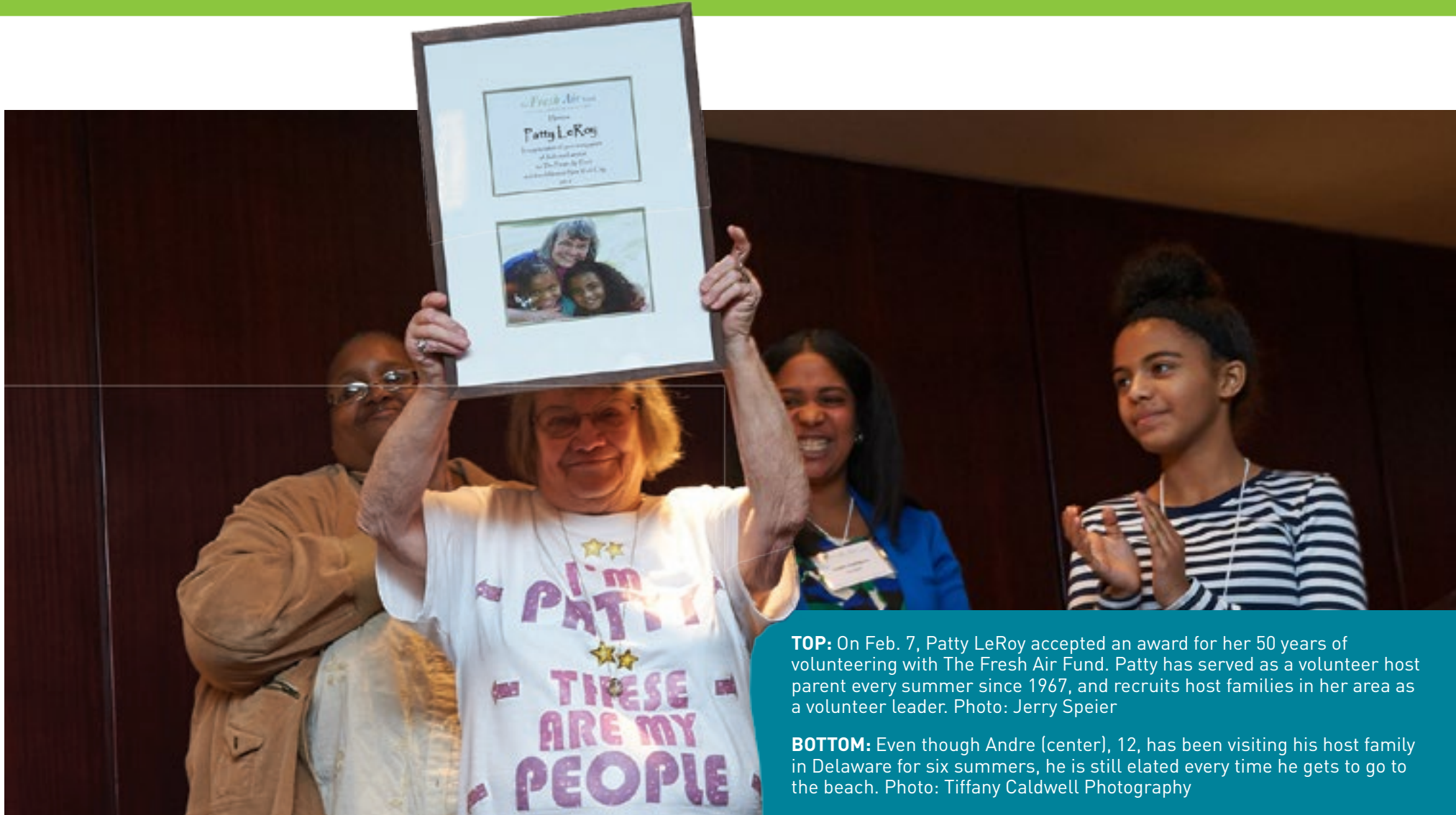
Departure time finally arrived, and the energy level among the children shot up. Tenniel Hansen, a Fresh Air Fund host and chairperson for Rensselaer, N.Y., since 2004, began corralling the children into an organized line. The children, chattering with excitement, each face bright with a smile, gathered their bags and began moving toward the buses. "These summers do so much for these kids — a chance to ride a bike, walk in the woods, have some quiet," Hansen, said. "All you need is a big heart."

TOP: Suejona (left), 14, awaits the bus that will take her to visit her host family in Freeville, N.Y. Photo: Jerry Speier

CENTER: Josaiah (right), 10, looks forward to returning to his host family's home in Taylor, Pa.. Photo: Jerry Speier

BOTTOM: Fresh Air children play cards while waiting for their buses to leave Port Authority. Photo: Jerry Speier





TOP: On Feb. 7, Patty LeRoy accepted an award for her 50 years of volunteering with The Fresh Air Fund. Patty has served as a volunteer host parent every summer since 1967, and recruits host families in her area as a volunteer leader. Photo: Jerry Speier

BOTTOM: Even though Andre (center), 12, has been visiting his host family in Delaware for six summers, he is still elated every time he gets to go to the beach. Photo: Tiffany Caldwell Photography

50 YEARS AND COUNTING

FIFTY YEARS AGO, CLARENCE “SCOOTER” LEROY HAPPENED UPON A SMALL ARTICLE IN HIS LOCAL PAPER THAT PIQUED HIS INTEREST: A PROGRAM OFFERING NEW YORK CITY KIDS A SUMMER BREAK FROM URBAN LIFE WAS LOOKING FOR VOLUNTEER HOST FAMILIES. LEROY AND HIS WIFE, PATTY, HAD JUST BOUGHT A HOME ON A HALF-ACRE PROPERTY IN BALLSTON SPA, A RURAL VILLAGE IN SARATOGA COUNTY, N.Y., FILLED WITH FARMS AND OPEN SPACES. IT WAS A PERFECT PLACE, HE THOUGHT, FOR A CHILD TO GET AWAY FROM THE BUSTLING STREETS OF NEW YORK CITY. THEIR BOXES WERE NOT YET UNPACKED, THEIR SECOND CHILD WAS ON THE WAY, BUT THE LEROYS COULDN’T WAIT.

When 7-year-old Marilyn arrived from Harlem, her hair neatly braided, clutching a small suitcase, it’s hard to say who was more nervous. “I was scared to death,” Patty LeRoy recalled. “I thought, what if she doesn’t like my food, what if she doesn’t like us? We came from such different backgrounds.” Indeed, this was 1966 and racial and cultural conflicts were rampant. But after only a few moments with Marilyn, all concerns vanished. “She was a beautiful, bright, curious child,” LeRoy said. Marilyn immediately bonded with the LeRoys’ daughter Charlene, who was also 7. The two girls spent those weeks playing outdoors non-stop in the LeRoys’ expansive yard. “Looking out from the kitchen window, I can still picture Marilyn doing cartwheels across the lawn, and watching her legs fly by over and over,” LeRoy said.

Fifty years and dozens of Fresh Air children later, Patty LeRoy, now 78, is still going strong. Although sadly, Scooter LeRoy passed away in 2010, she continues to host children and act as the Fund Representative for Saratoga County, a post she has held since 1994. Her three grown children are Fresh Air hosts now, and her youngest, Tricia Barkman, is chairperson of The Fund’s Schenectady area.

“It’s my passion,” said Patty LeRoy, an avid Fund proselytizer. Her car is spray painted with “The Fresh Air Fund” in large

colorful letters, along with her phone number, in case a potential host drives by and gets inspired. “I cherish these children, and I’m so grateful that I’ve had the privilege of spending my time with them. Together our family and our Fresh Air children learned about different religions and different cultures; we’ve shown great respect for each other.”

A few of the dozens of children the LeRoys hosted over the years remain close. Jerry Bobé — who calls LeRoy “Mom” — grew up in the Bronx and visited the LeRoys from the age of 5 in 1978, until he turned 18. They lost touch for a few years, but now Bobé, 43, a bus operator on Long Island, comes back whenever he can. “They’re my second family,” he said. “Patty is one of the best people I’ve ever met. She never takes a penny, she gets paid in love. It’s really awe-inspiring.”

Bobé loves to sit on the back porch of the LeRoys’ home and reminisce. He remembers arriving as a 5-year-old, and that their bikes, when left on the lawn at night, would still be there when they woke in the morning. “That blew my mind,” he said. “And they only closed the car windows when they were afraid it would rain. That was plain crazy.” Bobé often thinks about how much his time at Ballston Spa expanded his worldview. “I considered myself both a city mouse and a country mouse — I got to live both sides.”

The LeRoys’ youngest daughter, Tricia Barkman — now 45 with four children of her own — can’t remember a time when her family didn’t host Fresh Air Fund youngsters. She always looked forward to summer, when different children visited throughout July and August.

“I didn’t go to camp; camp came to me,” Barkman said. Each child became a member of the extended family, and added more fun to the neighborhood games. Barkman’s own sister is 10 years older, so it was always nice having girls around who were her own age. “We would paint each other’s nails, play hopscotch, ride bikes — someone tried to teach me double-dutch, but I never suc-

ceeded,” she said. The fact that the children came from different backgrounds and looked different meant nothing.

“My parents taught us not to see color,” she said. “They taught us that these children are just like us — they just live in taller buildings, and they have the opportunity to take buses, trains, and taxis, and we don’t. Without coming out and saying it, they taught us to appreciate what we had.”

One of Barkman’s Fresh Air sisters over many summers was Donnalese Donaldson-Robinson, who began coming to the LeRoys when she was 10. Now 46, Donaldson-Robinson speaks to Barkman regularly. “I have the best memories,” said Donaldson-Robinson, a charter-school teacher. “I loved running around outside barefoot, and being free. The LeRoys’ home was a great place for a kid to be in the summer.” Indeed, not only did the LeRoys have a surplus of love, they also had their own ice cream truck — arguably every child’s dream. The girls would spend the night in the truck, sneaking ice cream, until Barkman’s mischievous older brother, pretending to be a monster, spooked them back inside. “The LeRoys opened their home and heart to me, and I’m blessed,” Donaldson-Robinson said. “Patty will always be my mom — I can count on her.”

In February 2016, Patty LeRoy was honored for 50 years of service to The Fresh Air Fund. During the ceremony at The Fresh Air Fund’s Friendly Towns Volunteer Leadership Conference at the Marriott Marquis in New York City, her children, grandchildren, former and current Fresh Air Fund children and Fund volunteers gathered for a Patty appreciation day filled with hugs and teary speeches.

“I’ll keep hosting and helping as long as I can,” she promised.

WANTED: LOVING FAMILIES

This summer, join thousands of volunteer host families in suburbs and rural neighborhoods along the East Coast and Southern Canada as they share the beauty of their communities with New York City children. You don’t need to be rich. You don’t need to live on acres of farmland. You just need an open heart and an open home.

First-time Fresh Air visitors range in age from 7 to 12 years old, and stay for one to two weeks. New York City families can also host children during their summer vacations in the country. Children who are re-invited to visit the same host family can continue with The Fund through age 18.

Host families and their New York City visitors experience a summer filled with friendships, smiles, adventures, trust, appreciation, growth and learning. On their Fresh Air visits, children may milk a cow, engage in the arts, discover the wonders of the night-time sky, pick fruits and vegetables and go swimming.

Those who have hosted Fresh Air Fund youngsters never forget their visitors, or the benefits to both their family and their community. The majority of the children are re-invited to stay with the same host families year after year, and often form bonds that last a lifetime. The Fund is always looking for warm, loving people who are willing to open their homes and their hearts. Could that be you?

For more information about becoming a volunteer host family, contact The Fresh Air Fund at (800) 367-0003, or visit freshair.org.





THE FRESH AIR FUND'S ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS

The Fresh Air Fund's Career Awareness Program is designed to extend the camping experience beyond a summer and into a year-round enrichment program. Students apply in the 6th grade and attend Camp Mariah, The Fund's Career Awareness Camp, in Fishkill, N.Y., in the summer. They continue with the program during the school year in New York City and at camp with a focus on educational options, academic support and career exploration.

The Career Awareness Program includes intensive 24-day summer camp sessions, along with off-season weekend camping trips for 300 boys and girls at Camp Mariah. In addition to traditional activities, campers explore STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics) topics at camp through learning about the environment, both in the sciences and sustainability, music and technology, and lessons on math and its concepts.

Other academic enrichment and leadership programs include the annual spring Career Fair in which New York City volunteers lead career workshops. Throughout the year, visits to corporate partners expose children to a range of career opportunities. From tutoring to The Fund's College Connections Program, students have a strong network of year-round support in place to help with their academic success.



THE MODEL FARM AND NUTRITION CENTER: TEACHING WISDOM FOR LIFE

COW THERAPY

Amy Mota had been living in a shelter with her mother and sister when she found her way to Camp ABC. Camp was the first time in months the 8-year-old had slept in a bed. "It was the one place I could relax," remembered Mota, now 20. "And it was the one place where I knew what to expect from day to day."

On the second day of camp, Mota's group visited the Model Farm. There, for the first time in her life, she encountered all manner of livestock — goats, chickens, sheep. She found the animals, particularly 2,000-pound Sunshine the cow, terrifying and unpredictable. "I was so tiny, and it was so huge," she said. "I didn't think any living thing could be so big."

Soon, however, the animals, specifically Sunshine, became her refuge, and she spent as much time with Sunshine as she could. "I would have three-hour sessions of cow therapy," she said. "It was incredibly healing."

Mota returned year after year, eventually becoming first a part of the Teen Leadership Program, then a counselor-in-training (CIT), a counselor, and now a staffer at the Model Farm and Nutrition Center. She's studying zoology at Bronx Community College, and plans to transfer to

SUNY Oswego. Her goal is to get a PhD in zoology, and eventually to go to Africa and study safari animals, specifically giraffes, which fascinate her.

As a counselor, Mota has been able to help children who struggle as she herself struggled, using animals for healing. "The connection with the animals is deep and unspoken," she explained. "Sometimes animals can reach us when people can't."

Amanda, a quiet 10-year-old camper from the Bronx, is also taken with Sunshine. On a recent visit to the farm, she stroked Sunshine's back, murmuring softly to her. "It makes me calm here," she said. "All my troubles go away."

Mota is also a role model. Sensing a kindred spirit, children open up to her about their hardships. She motivates them: "Trouble and sadness didn't stop me from succeeding, and it won't stop you. I lifted myself up despite everything, and so can you." Mota tells the children about the friends she has lost to drugs, and she advises them to stay busy with positive activities and positive people. Most important, she admonishes the children to keep coming back to camp. "If I wasn't here I could have been on the street doing bad things," she said. "I came here for 11 years, and it saved me."

WEST POINT FARMER

Farm Director Stephen McFall, 20, took a different route to the farm. Now a junior at West Point, the Bronx native was never a Fresh Air Fund camper; he did, however, spend many summers on his grandparents' farm in Atlanta, helping his grandfather with the crops and the animals. He loved country life, and the gratification of seeing the results of his hard labor. McFall was a staffer at the Model Farm and Nutrition Center for three summers before becoming director.

Here, as in school, McFall works long hours. He's up and ready by 6:45 a.m., and is joined by three junior farmers. The campers come at 7 a.m., do their chores, feed and walk the animals, and clean the pens. McFall — while in college pursuing a double major in cryptology and engineering — knows how to work hard. But at camp, he's learned valuable nonacademic skills: public speaking, running workshops, teaching children to plant, harvest and, for the first time, process honey. "Here I learned how to lead," he said. "And I learned patience."

Jonah is McFall's biggest fan; the 11-year-old looks at McFall with something akin to awe. "I bet he's going to be an army general one day," said the Brooklyn native. "I want to be like him





COUNTDOWN TO SUMMER

The moment children step onto the bus to a Fresh Air camp or visit with a volunteer host family, their life is changed forever. It's the start of an amazing journey that opens doors for thousands of New York City children from low-income communities. The Fresh Air Fund's official "Countdown to Summer" has begun and it's the perfect time to help send children on their way to a summer full of new experiences and adventures. Thanks to many generous contributions every year, thousands of New York City children get the opportunity to explore new environments, meet new people from different cultures, and build skills that can be utilized year-round.

Visit freshair.org/cts2016 to find out how you can unlock a child's limitless potential.

ABOVE: Fresh Air child Micah, 8, laughs at a joke his host sister Madison makes during his second visit to Ontario. Photo: Goldenview Photography

LEFT: Craig Rung talks with Hayden-Marks campers visiting the Nutrition Center about the quesadilla they will be learning to make that afternoon with ingredients from the Model Farm's garden. Photo: Joan Barker

when I grow up. I want to be in the FBI and catch criminals."

Working on a farm teaches many valuable lessons, and perhaps the most important is self-discipline. It is this self-discipline that helped McFall get into, and succeed at, one of the most competitive military academies in the world. "The kids get frustrated that there's so much to do," he said. "But I push them — whether it's weeding, cooking, or school, you can't get anywhere in life if you don't do things right."

FOOD = LIFE

Gina Kelling, 22, is on a mission. A nutritionist at the Model Farm and Nutrition Center, Kelling puts her all into teaching the children the importance of healthy eating. She inherited this passion from her father, a holistic doctor and nutritionist. "Food has always been important to my family," said Kelling, a senior at Hendrix College in Arkansas. "Sitting around a table is something especially human — to me, going through a drive-thru is sacrilegious."

At the Nutrition Center, youngsters learn about healthy food selection and prepare snacks such as smoothies,

salsa and muffins with ingredients collected from the camp garden. Campers also learn how the compost they collect at each camp meal is used to provide nutrients for the farm's vegetable garden. Thanks to a generous donation from Craig and Nan Rung, The Fund has upgraded the kitchen at the Nutrition Center and broadened and strengthened programming for future generations of campers.

As Kelling picked vegetables with the children and then methodically helped them prepare zucchini muffins, with fresh zucchini from the garden, she spoke animatedly about the importance of eating well. "This is the same body you'll have at age 52," she said to the roomful of 11-year-olds.

"You can't trade it in for a newer one, and what you put into it has long-lasting effects."

One serious-looking child watched Kelling thoughtfully as she spoke. "I'm going to ask my mother to give me oranges for a snack," she said. "They have lots of Vitamin C, so I won't get sick."

Kelling's father, who died two years ago, had a plaque on his office wall that read: "One man with enthusiasm is a majority." Working at the Nutrition Center, Kelling honors his memory. "I feel more connected with my dad here than at any other time," she said. "He was so passionate about health, and by sharing this passion with others, I'm reminded of him every day."

OPPOSITE, TOP: At Camp Mariah, campers can participate in typical camp activities like outdoor field games while also attending career classes during their 24-day stay. Photo: Joan Barker

OPPOSITE, UPPER MIDDLE: Campers who attend one of The Fresh Air Fund's five overnight camps can visit the Nutrition Center and Model Farm and learn how to care for the animals. Photo: Joan Barker

OPPOSITE, LOWER MIDDLE: Stephen McFall is not only an important member of the farm staff; he also serves as a role model to the campers who visit the farm. Photo: Joan Barker

OPPOSITE, BOTTOM: Farm staffer Amy Mota uses her own experience as a Fresh Air child to help campers. Photo: Joan Barker

LEFT: A camper helps prepare vegetables for the dinner program at the Nutrition Center. Photo: Joan Barker





ABOVE: Girls from Camp ABC practice putting together their tents before they go on their overnight hike. Photo: Joan Barker

ABOVE RIGHT: Campers discover and develop new passions through camp experiences such as music classes. Photo: Joan Barker

BELOW LEFT: Career Awareness students discuss promoting their fictional artists during a job shadowing at Warner Music group. Photo: Courtney Rung

BELOW RIGHT: Val Blavatnik is surrounded by campers to celebrate the opening of The Blavatnik Family and Warner Music Group Center for Music at Camp Hidden Valley. Photo: Joan Barker

WARNER MUSIC GROUP WELCOMES FRESH AIR STUDENTS

TWELVE-YEAR-OLD NAILA AND HER FELLOW TEENAGE MUSIC PRODUCERS WERE IN FULL BRAINSTORMING MODE: HOW TO BEST PROMOTE THEIR (THEORETICAL) ARTIST, BRUNO MARS, FOR HIS (THEORETICAL) UPCOMING CONCERT AT BARCLAYS CENTER. “OFFER A GIVEAWAY,” SUGGESTED 13-YEAR-OLD JOJO. “MAKE BACKSTAGE VIDEOS, AND STREAM THEM LIVE,” ADDED KACEY.

As part of a recent job shadowing at the headquarters of Warner Music Group in Manhattan, 16 Fresh Air Fund middle schoolers — led by Warner execs — lived their music-producing dreams. For an hour and a half, students rotated through various stations in order to learn about different aspects of artist

promotion: sponsorship tie-ins, social media platforms, coordinating with YouTube celebrities, and picking the right venues. This experience inspired dreams of getting into the music biz. “I didn’t know this kind of thing even existed as a job,” Naila said. “I thought I wanted to be a singer, but this might be even better.”



THE FRESH AIR FUND’S SHARPE RESERVATION

The Fund’s Sharpe Reservation has close to 2,000 acres of beautiful land, with lakes, ponds and wooded hiking trails. Set in the Hudson Highlands in Fishkill, N.Y., Sharpe Reservation is the site for The Fresh Air Fund’s five overnight summer camps, where 3,000 children experience life outside the city. During the school year, more than 15,000 children from community and school groups, as well as Girl Scout troops, visit the property. Sharpe Reservation provides an outdoor classroom for informal learning through curriculum-based activities that inspire an appreciation of nature and a greater understanding of the environment. Here on the expansive property, children enjoy interactive demonstrations and hands-on experiences guided by professionals. The reservation also houses a nature center, ropes courses, trails, lakes, ponds, a Model Farm and a planetarium, all with an environmental science and educational focus. Camp facilities are available for rent and are utilized by a variety of schools and organizations for weekend camping, day trips, conferences and retreats. To learn more visit freshair.org/sharpe.

The job shadowing was just a small part of Warner Music Group’s ongoing dedication to The Fund. In August 2015 the Blavatnik Family and Warner Music Group Center for Music opened at The Fund’s Camp Hidden Valley in Fishkill, N.Y. The new center features an instructional music room with guitars, drums and keyboards; a computer lab equipped with state-of-the-art music software; a sound system; and a 1,600-square-foot performing arts space. Year-round, campers will have the opportunity to learn about all aspects of the music industry, from composition to performance, through programs that include instrumental, vocal and singing workshops, production and arranging instruction, and classes in music theory and history.

The music center was the brainchild of 18-year-old Val Blavatnik, son of Warner Music Group owner Len Blavatnik. Val Blavatnik, a dedicated Fresh Air Fund volunteer, came up with the idea for a new music center after spending time at camp, talking with staff and campers about his greatest passion: music. Although his family is a long-time Fund donor, Blavatnik, who has his own record label, wanted to do more. “Most of the kids here grow up in the Bronx and Brooklyn where hip-hop and a lot of other music originated, and they don’t even realize it,” said Blavatnik. “I wanted to give them a fuller picture of the music from their neighborhoods, and from the world around them.”

Since the ribbon cutting, Blavatnik has visited camp to help launch the center by assisting with teaching the new digital music programs and talking to campers about their vision for the center. During the academic year, the music center is a focal point for The Fresh Air Fund’s off-season educational programs and leadership development weekend retreats.

“Many of these kids have dreams of being recording artists, and through the music center, they’re one step closer to fulfilling that dream,” said Eliah Seton, president of ADA Worldwide, Warner Music Group’s subsidiary. “Most people have no understanding about how a song gets written and what happens until it’s played on the radio or you hear it on an iPhone. The music center and the job shadowing educates the kids about what goes on behind the scenes, and shows them that there’s a whole industry that can be a source of really cool jobs if they develop the right skills.”

It was 6:30 p.m. at the job shadowing, and though many of the children had been up since 6:30 a.m., they were still going strong. “Coming up with ways to promote your artist is a harder job than I thought it would be,” said Reynold, 15. Ashanti, 13, agreed that the music business is complicated but it’s only whet her appetite for more. “I love music,” she said. “This experience has opened my mind.”



NEW SUMMER, NEW LEADERSHIP

THE FRESH AIR FUND'S NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FATIMA A. SHAMA, GREW UP IN THE SOUNDVIEW SECTION OF THE BRONX. "I COULD HAVE EASILY BEEN A FRESH AIR FUND CHILD," SAID SHAMA, THE YOUNGEST OF FIVE CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANT PARENTS. SHAMA ATTENDED BINGHAMTON UNIVERSITY ON A SCHOLARSHIP, EARNED A MASTER'S DEGREE FROM BARUCH COLLEGE'S SCHOOL OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, AND SERVED AS THE COMMISSIONER OF IMMIGRANT AFFAIRS UNDER FORMER NEW YORK CITY MAYOR MICHAEL BLOOMBERG. SHE'S COMMITTED HER PROFESSIONAL LIFE TO HELPING PEOPLE LIKE HER OWN FAMILY, AND TO "PAYING IT FORWARD."

Q: How do you relate to The Fresh Air Fund children you serve?

A: I grew up in a neighborhood with the same kinds of challenges that today's Fresh Air children face: poor educational options, drugs and teen pregnancy, violence and not a lot of open or green space. My family never had the money to send me to camp.

Q: What did your parents do to make sure you had a better life?

A: My parents worked hard, and stressed education. My mother is from Brazil, and my father was Palestinian and emigrated to Brazil as a teenager. After they married, my parents came to New York City to build a better life. My father began as a street vendor and then opened a small grocery store, and he creatively bartered food for tuition so my siblings and I could go to Catholic school. My parents had limited English skills, but never allowed poverty or cultural differences to stand between them and their hopes and dreams.

Q: What are your goals for The Fresh Air Fund?

A: We receive over 11,000 applications each summer, and right now we are able to serve only 7,000 children. We need to make sure that all kids who can benefit from a Fresh Air experience get one. Our relationships, which start with children during the summer, have blossomed into meaningful year-round academic enrichment programs. I'd love to make it possible

for more children and families to have that opportunity. Our children come from across the city, and there are great community-based organizations we can partner with so that our kids get the kind of support that will help them succeed through life.

Q: Any changes you hope to make to The Fund camps?

A: The camp experience is fun layered with enrichment of the best kind. Without taking away the fun, I want to enhance that enrichment. So for example, when the children swim in a lake, they also learn about environmental sciences, and are exposed to concepts like pH, ecosystem and the cycle of life. Then when they return to school and a lesson is taught in class, they make an immediate connection with their camp experience.

Q: After nearly 140 years, in what ways does The Fresh Air Fund continue to make a difference?

A: In 1877, The Fund was started to help children, living in crowded tenements and surrounded by the tuberculosis epidemic, leave the city by visiting a family living in the country. Today, too many city children face a different — but equally difficult — set of challenges, including public health problems like asthma, gun violence, and a lack of healthy food options in their neighborhood. But the benefits provided by The Fund remain the same: children are getting a change from the



SUMMER CAMP ADVENTURES

At Fresh Air Fund camps, 3,000 boys and girls experience both academic enrichment and fun. Campers grow socially and emotionally, while interacting with counselors who are role models and mentors.

For at least two weeks, children swim and row boats out on the lake, and also enhance their computer skills. Campers study the planets and constellations to better appreciate the beauty of the night sky, with its sea of stars unobstructed by streetlights. They pick vegetables to prepare healthy snacks — such as a fresh tomato salsa — at the newly renovated Nutrition Center, and learn about animals at the Model Farm.

The five Fresh Air Fund camps are located on The Fund's Sharpe Reservation, which has close to 2,000 acres of wilderness property, in Fishkill, N.Y., 65 miles north of New York City. The Fresh Air camps are: Camp Anita Bliss Coler for girls, ages nine to 15; Camp Hayden-Marks Memorial for boys, ages nine to 12; Camp Tommy for 12- to 15-year-old boys; Camp Hidden Valley for boys and girls with and without special needs, ages 8 to 12; and Camp Mariah, which is also the base for The Fund's Career Awareness Program, for boys and girls in 7th to 9th grades. In honor of their generous support, Camp Mariah is named after Board member Mariah Carrey, and Camp Tommy is named after Tommy Hilfiger.

ABOVE: Girls from Camp ABC challenge themselves and work together at the low ropes course to learn about the importance of perseverance and teamwork. Photo: Joan Barker

BELOW: The Fresh Air Fund's Executive Director, Fatima Shama, poses with campers at Camp Mariah during her inaugural visit to The Fund's Sharpe Reservation, home to all five overnight summer camps. Photo: Joan Barker

city, and they are meeting people with different experiences who live in communities that look different than what they are used to. In bringing people together, we have changed lives, and have been part of the evolution of this country. In so many ways, we are as contemporary and meaningful today as when we first started.

Q: Who are your heroes?

A: To start, my mom: she gave up everything to come to a foreign land because she believed it would make life better for her and her family. As a parent myself, I can only imagine

how she struggled — I'm the beneficiary of her commitment to a better life.

I've read about a lot of amazing people; however someone I've had the pleasure of learning from and worked with personally is Michael Bloomberg, my professional hero. He is an extraordinary man with strong core values. He believes in making the world a better place one neighborhood, and now one city, at a time. He gave me the chance to serve my city, and confirmed for me that this is how I want to devote my life. 🌱





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